



EPISODE 2x12: "Pull the Trigger"

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Selected scenes culled from the "SERENITY" Shooting Script and
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Teaser

EXT. SPACE

Serenity sails through the black.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY

SIMON packs up medical supplies as KAYLEE follows him about the room.

KAYLEE

But the Captain is a moron! I know this from years of knowing this. He's a total backbirth – plus, he's still shook up from the job on Lilac.

SIMON

Getting chased by Reavers... I imagine that would be a little exciting.

KAYLEE

(not really listening)

And everybody knows he's been extra crabby since Inara left the ship—again!—which letting her go this time—again!—just proves his moron-hood!

SIMON

I think things between the Captain and Inara are very... complicated.

KAYLEE

There's no call for you to leave, too!

SIMON

It's time, Kaylee. It's long past time.

KAYLEE

But where y'all gonna go? You're wanted fugitives! The Alliance—

SIMON

The Alliance thinks River is dead. They probably stopped looking for us months ago. Anyway, there must be some out of the way place that needs a doctor. Zoe mentioned they needed help with a lung disease on Haven...

KAYLEE
But we need your help!
(beat)
We're all the time getting shot, or cut up, ears flying this way and that...

SIMON
You can find a competent medic, I'm sure.

KAYLEE
Yeah, but he wouldn't be you.

He stops to look at her. She looks away, not meeting his gaze.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
'Sides, now that Inara's gone, River's been about my only good girl friend. She don't always make sense of any kind, but she's a dear heart to me.

SIMON
And you to her. Your kindness, of all the things here, is what I...

They move closer, but Simon thinks better of it and pulls back.

SIMON (cont'd)
But we knew this was coming. Serenity isn't our home. River and I have to find our place. That's just the way of it.
(beat)
I should pack.

Kaylee looks down, defeated.

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA – SAME TIME

We drop back outside to see RIVER watching the whole exchange unseen.

After a few beats, she goes to the:

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – CONTINUOUS

Which is empty but for the banged-up HOVER-MULE hanging above her.

She drifts beneath it - touching the ship with both her eyes and fingertips, looking about her with every step.

Every touch conveys some memory or energy to her: a gamut of emotions plays over her face.

RIVER

It's peaceful here. It can be. At times.

(beat)

One man's coincidence is another man's evidence.

She whispers as she goes; her eyes are a little unfocused. She touches the airlock DOOR.

RIVER (cont'd)

Oh but you did. You turn on any of my crew, you turn on me. But since that's a concept you can't seem to wrap your head around—

She then makes her way along the edge of a wall, touching it lightly as she goes.

RIVER (cont'd)

—then you've got no place here.

She glances up, somewhat fondly, at the suspended hover-mule.

RIVER (cont'd)

I swear to you I will get very choked up... Honestly, there could be tears.

She starts up the stairs to the upper catwalk. Each step meticulous and slow. Halfway, she stops again, closes her eyes.

RIVER (cont'd)

I'll be in my bunk.

She races up the rest of the stairs two at a time and arrives at the door to Shuttle One. She stops. Enters.

INT. SERENITY – SHUTTLE ONE – CONTINUOUS

The shuttle is filled with beautiful decorations that mark the walls, the ornate bed and furniture, the dressings of a Companion. They shimmer so bright, too real it seems, but soon the images begin to dim.

River walks into the room and—

The memories fade and reality returns.

The metallic walls gleam dull behind where curtains hung, a couple of incense sticks remain on the floor, and an ornate trunk stays in place in the corner.

River wanders about, muttering various phrases as she stops in places, soaking up the energy of the place.

RIVER

What did I say to you about coming into my shuttle
uninvited?

(wanders)

Last time you get to call me whore.

(wanders)

This doesn't make you a man.

She lies on the floor, where the bed used to be. Touches the air above her, suppliant.

RIVER (cont'd)

Oh god... *na gan dao hen hao* <that feels so good, just
there...> just there, yes, oh, OH—

MAL (OS)

Hey!

She looks over to see MAL in the doorway, looking not at all comfortable.

MAL (cont'd)

Um, I don't see any cause for you to be here... doin' that...

RIVER

(complete lack of emotion)

Oh, god, you fill me up, don't stop, it's so good—

MAL

I'm sure it's all kinds a' nice, but you really should stop.
Now.

RIVER

This is where she feigned.

MAL

Where she fainted?

RIVER

She lied. Sweet lies, like spun sugar. A web around her
eyes. A veil. Can't see in, can't see out.

MAL

Right. Well, it was Inara's job to lie with men, if that's
even remotely what you're talking about...

She stops, but says nothing.

MAL (cont'd)

You know, little one, you were great on Lilac. Fine little criminal. Saved our shiny *pi gu* <bottoms>, more than like. I'd as soon have you stay as not. Your brother and I just don't—

RIVER

(standing)

Everybody leaves you.

She's up and past him with crisp efficiency.

RIVER (cont'd)

I have things to alphabetize.

She leaves. He lets her go, looks back at the shuttle. After a moment, he steps in, looking around.

He walks over to the ORNATE CHEST and opens it. The sense of routine to his actions is clear. He pushes the clothes to the side and pulls out a small, expensive looking GLASS BOTTLE.

He picks up the bottle, opens it, and sprays a little on the wall that would've been near her bed.

He closes his eyes, brings his face close and smells her scent on the wall—

WASH (OS)

So.

WASH is in the doorway. Mal starts back, tries to think of something to pretend to be doing.

WASH (cont'd)

We're closing in on Beaumonde, should hit atmo in ten.
Thought you might wanna Wave Mingo, set up the meet.
If you're, um, done, ah, smelling the shuttle.

Mal stands there.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – MINUTES LATER

Wash pilots the ship. Mal sits in the co-pilot's chair. Two of the Wave monitors are lit, MINGO and FANTY each on one of them.

MAL (to Wave)

Coin was there, just like you said it would be. Other'n a few... minor complications...

WASH
(under his breath)
Yeah, the way leprosy is a minor skin irritation.

MAL
(under his breath, to Wash)
Bi jweh <Shut up>.
(to Wave)
Job went off just as planned.

MINGO (via Wave)
Attract any attention?

FANTY (via Wave)
Unwanted attention?

MAL (to Wave)
No. Dusted the CorVue monitor. Security contractors
won't talk none.

MINGO (via Wave)
You aren't lying to my brother now, are you?

MAL (to Wave)
I don't lie to my business partners.
(beat)
We'll be dirtside in a few. What say we meet at the usual
place? We bring your share, you bring us a new job?

INT. MINGO AND FANTY'S OFFICE – EVENING

Mingo and Fanta sit in two chairs in the middle of a large room and look at Mal on their own monitors, two of many on the wall.

FANTY (to Wave)
You bring us our share, and we'll CONSIDER giving you
another job... 'partner'.

MAL (via Wave)
You're so good with people. It makes me all weepy inside.
See you soon boys.

Mingo shuts off both monitors. Above the Wave monitors is a large CorVue screen, on which plays a news report.

NEWSPERSON (VO)
...only survivors of the massacre apparently locked
themselves in the Trade Station vault until help arrived.

ON THE SCREEN we see an image of the GUARD from the Lilac heist.

GUARD

It just seemed like the smart thing to do.

OFFSCREEN REPORTER

And the money?

GUARD

Wasn't room for it, we threw it out. Reavers musta took it.

Mingo looks at his brother.

MINGO

It's unfortunate that the Reavers didn't do the job for us.

FANTY

(nods)

Forces us to get messy.


Mingo hits a few more buttons, and the face of a man wearing a simple private-class MILITARY HAT fills one of the wave monitor screens. The man's name is REX.

REX

Ni hao <Hello>.

MINGO

Rex. The Reynolds job is on.



Act One

EXT. BENA - COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY

We see only the snowy mountains in the background, framed by Asian-style roof and pillars.

From the bottom of frame INARA rises, climbing steps we don't see, every inch of her steeled with poise and resolve. Her beauty is fluid, her dress elegant, a sort of sari slung over her bare shoulder, but as she crests the staircase and approaches camera, we can see nothing ingratiating in her stare.

As she nears, we find ourselves at waist level, until her hand all but fills the frame, clenched tight.

It opens and a silken kerchief unravels before us. Covered in blood.

OBUN (OS)

You expect me to do your laundry for you?

We widen to find Inara standing before a seated military thug named OBUN. Two of his MEN, clearly of a local and disorganized militia, drape themselves on ornate furniture nearby. To one side stands an older woman, as elegant as – if more austere than – Inara. This is the House Priestess, SHEYDRA.

INARA

This belongs to one of our girls. Four of your men stopped her on her way back home.

OBUN

I know all about that. It's a separate matter.

INARA

She will be bedridden for a month. And she very nearly—

The two men LAUGH off to the side. One mumbles:

MILITIA MAN #1

Ridden in bed. Sounds about right...

Obun does not laugh, but there is a slight twitch at the corners of his mouth. He continues to meet Inara's gaze.

OBUN

Those men have been identified and will be dealt with.

INARA

How?

OBUN

That is not your concern.

INARA

Every girl in this house is my concern! Those animals raped her and left her in—

SHEYDRA

Inara! General Obun is here on a separate matter. <If you bring this up now he will think us capricious>.

INARA

<He thinks us weak>!

OBUN

<And you think me an uneducated pig who can only speak one language and curse in two>.

Obun leans back in his seat, smiles arrogantly.

INARA

General Obun, you may be sure I have never impugned your linguistics.

OBUN

I have come here as a diplomat, with all the necessary pomp. I bring gifts, and ask in humility for what I may take as I please. Why can we not resolve this?

INARA

Companions are not to be bought and sold—

OBUN

Base hypocrisy! Companions sell themselves to anyone they choose.

INARA

To anyone they choose. They cannot be forced into any arrangement against their will. That is Guild Law.

OBUN

There was a time, when it was against the law for a woman to speak to a man, much less a general, as you do. A time when a woman would kneel and show obeisance.

INARA

Perhaps you should book passage for Earth-that-Was, circa the fourteenth century? Our ancestors left that behind long ago, General.

SHEYDRA

Inara!

(to Obun)

General, she is upset over her friend's pain and speaks not her mind. <Please accept our apologies and let us confer awhile on your request>.

OBUN

<I will leave my offerings for you to gaze upon. My next ones will not shine as brightly>.

He storms off, along with the two men. Sheydra looks at Inara.

SHEYDRA

Did you learn those fine negotiating techniques while on this famed pirate ship I keep hearing so much about?

Inara looks at her, shocked.

SHEYDRA (cont'd)
(exasperated smile)
I do love to watch you boil...

EXT. BEAUMONDE – ATOLL PLAZA - EVENING

Serenity touches down on the crowded atoll amidst a number of other, equally disreputable ships. The place is filled with every kind of immigrant culture and shop imaginable.

Among the various vignettes we briefly capture is a very proper Asian WOMAN walking by a slovenly MAN in a padded flight helmet, who calls out to her in Chinese:

FLIGHT-HELMET MAN
PEOW-liang de shaojie, nee GOO wuo HUHnee SHANG-hao. Wuh HWAY wrongnee shungkai roo hua <Pretty lady, hire me for the night and I'll open you like a flower>.

WOMAN
Wuo DWAY-nee BOO-woon, boo JEN <I neither see nor hear you>.

EXT. SERENITY – EVENING

The ramp is open and everyone is filing out, ready to hit the town. Kaylee talks to Simon, who has River in hand.

KAYLEE
Don't talk to the barkers – talk to the captains. You look the captains in the eye, know who you're dealing with.

SIMON
I wish there was...

Mal passes between them, paying no heed to their moment. Wash and ZOE are a step behind.

They pause and Zoe and Simon share an awkward hug, formal and quick, while River embraces Wash.

ZOE

Good luck, doctor. You run into trouble, you know where we are. Wave the ship or Haven and we'll do what we can.

SIMON

I... Thank you.

WASH

Of course, you know how things are with us. We'll probably bring more trouble than you had to start.

JAYNE ambles up to the cluster. Simon extends his hand. Jayne just looks at it.

SIMON

Well, Jayne, it's been...

Beat.

JAYNE

Yeah.

Jayne nods a farewell to River.

JAYNE (cont'd)

Don't get yourselves killed.

WASH

(feigns wiping away tears, sniffs)

Beautiful... Just beautiful. Can anyone spare a hanky?

Zoe elbows him. She and Jayne move off down the ramp. Wash claps Simon on the shoulder.

WASH (cont'd)

Uh, You know... What Jayne said. Only nicer.

(beat; he smiles)

You'll be okay.

He then runs to catch up with his wife - just as the helmeted man accosts her.

FLIGHT-HELMET MAN

(indicating Jayne)

PEOW-liang de shaojie, Booleetah, GOOwo <Pretty lady, forget him and hire me>!

WASH

Wo TAI-TAI boo PEOW-liang <My wife is not pretty>!

Zoe punches Wash in the arm with a smile as they pass by the man.

Kaylee looks Simon over one last time.

KAYLEE

You shouldn't oughta be so clean. It's a dead giveaway
you don't belong, you always gotta be tidy.

(fusses with his clothes)

Don't pay anybody in advance. And don't ride in anything
with a Capissen thirty-eight engine, they fall right out of
the sky.

SIMON

Kaylee.

KAYLEE

We'll all be at the Maidenhead. If you want to say
goodbye...

Simon nods, starts to say more, but—

Kaylee turns and heads off.

Simon watches her for a beat, then bends to gather their belongings.

River continues to watch the crew as they disappear into the throng.

SIMON

River... Do you want to stay with them?

As River watches, the Flight-Helmet Man, rebuffed by Zoe, approaches Kaylee, but
Jayne pushes him back.

RIVER

It's not safe.

Simon sighs and nods. Continues final adjustments on their luggage.

SIMON

No, I fear it's not safe anymore.

He doesn't hear her final words.

RIVER

For them.

EXT. THE MAIDENHEAD – LATER

The Maidenhead is a simple-looking structure, made of a combination of steel and what appears to be pink stone, but is more than likely concrete. An awning sticks out from the building above the main doors, and continues over a small outdoor seating area, with tables and chairs and a short railing separating it from the entrance walk.

Rex stands outside the Maidenhead, smoking a cigar near the main doors. He is indiscreet, wearing his simple military hat backwards and a simple coat.

He spots the crew walking up the street.

He turns away from the front doors and casually walks away, talking into his sleeve as he puffs on the cigar:

REX (into com)
You in position?

INT. THE MAIDENHEAD – SAME TIME

A LONG-HAIRED MAN and MAN wearing a BLACK BANDANA stand near a row of slot machines. The Long-Haired Man pulls one of the arms while the Bandana-Man answers.

BANDANA MAN (into com)
In position and losin' coin by the minute.

LONG-HAIRED MAN
(muttering)
Ain't that the truth.

EXT. THE MAIDENHEAD – SAME TIME

We see the crew enter the front doors behind Rex as he continues to talk.

REX (into com)
We'll be making money soon enough. You have any problems getting through?

LONG-HAIRED MAN (via com)
No. We're just a couple'a one-armed bandits ourselves, 'cept with two arms.

REX
Shiny. Now we wait for the twins.

INT. THE MAIDENHEAD – SAME TIME

We start on a CorVue screen, showing a news report. During this we come around to see that the screen has a blinking light behind it, come THROUGH the wiring of the back to look out at the bar, with the word "RECORDING" in the corner. Every screen is a camera, even down here.

Jayne and Zoe are on the upper level, at THE GUNCHECK. Wash stands near, eager to get down into the bar.

The guncheck's lockers rotate on a wheel: Jayne sets his gun carefully inside a locker, pulls out a CHIT – the locker closes and rotates to reveal another empty one. A large BOUNCER with a shockrod watches impassively.

JAYNE

Hate givin' up my sidearm. Feel nekkid without it.

WASH

I have that too, only with clothes.
(swipes at his clean upper lip)
And maybe my moustache.

Zoe deposits her weapon.

ZOE

So you walk around feelin' nekkid almost all the time?

WASH

I am a liberated man, my love.

ON THE STAIRS BELOW

Mal and Kaylee are heading down, arguing. Mal fiddles with his chit before pocketing it.

MAL

It's not my fault the Doc's got no stomach for Rim livin'—

KAYLEE

It is entirely and for all your fault! If you'd given Simon a moment, just a moment where he felt accepted, he might've—

MAL

What? Swept you into his cleanly arms? Made tidy love to you?

Zoe, Wash, and Jayne catch up to them.

KAYLEE

Don't you dare joke, Cap'n! You know how much I pined on Simon. And him fair sweet on me, I well believe, but he's so worried about being found out—

ZOE

Captain didn't make 'em fugitives.

KAYLEE

But he coulda made 'em family! Steada driving them off. Steada keeping Simon from seein' I was there, when I carried such a torch and we coulda – More'n a year now I ain't had nothin' twixt my nethers weren't run on batteries!

MAL

Oh, God! I can't know that!

JAYNE

I could stand to hear a little more...

KAYLEE

If you had a care for anybody's heart you woulda—

MAL

(enough)

You knew he was gonna leave. We never been but a way station to those two. And how do you know what he feels? He's got River to worry on but he still coulda shown you... if I truly wanted someone bad enough, wouldn't be a thing in the 'verse could stop me from going to her.

KAYLEE

Tell that to Inara.

For a moment, Mal is too shocked to react. Kaylee storms out.

INT. BENA – COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE – CORRIDOR – DAY

Inara and Sheydra walk down a corridor, passing a class where GIRLS are learning a sensuously ceremonial dance, all in saris and holding fans.

INARA

I didn't... have a pirate.

SHEYDRA

It's the talk of the House. That, and the handsome Jude who now has his eye on you. The girls all trade stories in the dorms at night. In one of them, you make love in a burning temple. I think that's my favorite.

INARA

This is unbearable. Captain Reynolds is no pirate. And he never laid a finger on me. I rented his shuttle, that's all.

SHEYDRA

A year on his shuttle and he never laid a finger on you? Or tried to? No wonder you left.

INARA

I left because... I couldn't... Those girls! *Byen dahTAHmenduhBAY joGOLuh!* <A switch to their backsides is just good enough>!

Sheydra smiles and looks into one of the classrooms as they pass.

SHEYDRA

Yes, those girls. They've learned more from you these last months than the rest of us could show them in two years. They look up to you.

INARA

Even if they gossip, I do find them very sweet. But they're not Companions. You started training me when I was twelve, and it took years of discipline and preparation before the physical act of pleasure was even mentioned. Most of these girls...

SHEYDRA

And what was the first lesson, Inara?

INARA

Control. Control was the first lesson. And the last. But these worlds are not like the Central Planets. There is barbarism dressed up in the most civil weeds. Men of the highest rank who don't know the difference between a Companion and a common whore.

SHEYDRA

You speak of General Obun.

INARA

Among others.
(beat)

Him being here... It's not safe.

SHEYDRA

That may be so, but a Companion works to defuse tension and treat a guest with deference.

INARA

A guest? General Obun is a thing that you shoot at! And then possibly cook. On a spit, over an open fire pit.

SHEYDRA

Inara. You're a wonderful teacher, and I'm grateful that you've sheltered with us these last months. But in the time since you left that... pirate ship... you've chiefly done two things: attempt to forget forever the memory of its apparently insufferable Captain, and done everything in your power to behave just like him.

INARA

(completely flustered)

What?! No! I'm not... I don't behave like...

SHEYDRA

The Companion I trained had not such a temper. We don't shoot people, Inara. And we try our best not to make them shoot us.

Sheydra leaves. Inara watches her, bewildered.

INARA

I'm nothing like him...

INT. THE MAIDENHEAD – SOME TIME LATER

Wash cheerily brings five mugs over to the table where Mal, Jayne, and Zoe wait.

WASH

Spiced ale for everyone, best in the house!

ZOE

(setting it aside)

Thank you, dear.

As everyone takes their mugs, Mal eyes the extra.

MAL

Kaylee ain't back yet.

WASH

I'll—

Jayne takes the extra mug.

WASH (cont'd)

(eyeing Jayne)

—get her another one when she is.

JAYNE

I'll cheer her up later. I got somethin' that'll make her feel good.

ZOE

Jayne!

JAYNE

What? My concoction. I improved on her engine-fermentation recipe, is all...

MAL

Better be all. No takin' advantage.

JAYNE

Mal. Come on!

WASH

(re: Zoe)

Does that mean we have to stop?

JAYNE

You know I wouldn't!

MAL

She's the best wrench in the skyways.

JAYNE

She ain't no wench!

MAL

Wrench! Best wrench I've ever seen, and we need her thinkin' straight, we wanna keep flyin'.

(beat)

Kaylee's heart's tore up. She'll fix it. Let her be.

EXT. BEAUMONDE - STREETS – SAME TIME

Kaylee walks down the street, wiping at her eyes with one hand as she looks at the storefronts.

She stops at a produce stand. Strawberries sit inside a sealed glass case. Her eyes brighten.

The Flight-Helmet Man follows her.

INT. THE MAIDENHEAD – A LITTLE LATER

The crew all drink their ale. Zoe looks around.

ZOE

Sir? Fanty and Mingo ain't usually late. Maybe we should—

MAL

Quit your worrying, Zoe. They live on the other side of this rock. They'll be—

JAYNE

Hey hey! The CV!

ANGLE ON – A CORVUE SCREEN IN THE CORNER, replaying the news report. On the screen is a shot of the town our gang robbed last episode, now half of it a smoking ruin.

Mal turns up a little drive-in type SPEAKER BOX at their table to hear:

NEWSPERSON (VO)

...that it was a band of Reavers remains unconfirmed. The only survivors of the massacre apparently locked themselves in the Trade Station vault until help arrived.

ON THE SCREEN we see an image of the GUARD from the Lilac heist.

GUARD (on CorVue)

It just seemed like the smart thing to do.

JAYNE

Weren't even your notion, fruitbat.

MAL

Shh.

OFFSCREEN REPORTER

And the money?

GUARD (on CorVue)

Wasn't room for it, we threw it out. Reavers musta took it.

JAYNE

Hey hey! Now I like him well.

ZOE

(turning down the sound)

For a purple-belly, he ain't half dumb.

(to Mal)

That was a good call, sir. Lotta people saved.

MAL

(brushes it off)

Lotta people get to spend the next year buryin' their whole town. Lucky souls.

JAYNE

Nothin' wrong with bein' a hero, 'specially when you still get paid.

MAL

Forget that talk.

(beat)

Ain't no heroes left in this 'Verse...

EXT. BEAUMONDE – DOCKS – SAME TIME

Simon and River walk the docks, looking for transport. Simon drags their luggage behind him, his medical bag is slung over one shoulder.

Mingo and Fanty pass by River.

River pauses and watches them walk away. She tilts her head a fraction, as if listening. Her eyes WIDEN with realization.

Act Two

EXT. THE MAIDENHEAD - NIGHT

Kaylee walks back to the front entrance. She stops at the outdoor seating area and leans against the railing, a small box of strawberries in one hand. She picks one free and studies it, as she does.

In the background, Flight-Helmet Man joins Rex near the front doors.

Kaylee looks up towards the street. A WELL-DRESSED MAN catches her eye, walking her way through the crowd in the street.

Kaylee takes a few steps toward him.

KAYLEE
Simon? Simon!

The well-dressed man holds hands with a WELL-DRESSED WOMAN, who was blocked from view by the crowd.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
(to herself)
Oh. Right. Why'd you ever want to come say one last
goodbye to me? Probably won't even remember me, after
a time.
(to the strawberry)
Sure hope he remembers what I told him.

She munches on it.

EXT. BEAUMONDE – DOCKS – SAME TIME

Simon and River stand near a large freighter, similar in appearance to Serenity, but slicker. Simon negotiates with the FREIGHTER CAPTAIN outside the cargo bay doors. Crowds of people mull about, some unsavory looking.

SIMON
Does it have a... Capissen thirty-eight engine?

FREIGHTER CAPTAIN
Now that's an awful specific question.

River tugs on Simon, upset.

RIVER

We have to go home. We have to shutter the windows,
Simon!

SIMON

River, it's okay. We'll be going soon.

(to the captain)

I heard the... C-thirty-eights... they fall out of the sky.

FREIGHTER CAPTAIN

(chuckles)

Wouldn't a figured you'd be one to know yer engines. The
Son of Osiris here is powered by a Haifeng X-ten. She'll
stay up, if that's yer concern.

RIVER

Simon! We have to get the family to the basement! A
storm's coming!

(tugs again, away from the ship)

We have to go home!

SIMON

This ship is the *Son of Osiris*, River. Remember? That's
why we picked it.

(back to the captain)

I apologize.

FREIGHTER CAPTAIN

Are you sure she's okay?

SIMON

She's fine. She's just having a bad day.

RIVER

They don't know. There's no sirens. They don't know it's
coming!

River's outbursts are attracting attention. A YOUNG PUNK, skinny, ferrety, looks
their way, munching at a hunk of meat on a stick.

FREIGHTER CAPTAIN

Can't have that happenin' on my ship, son. Noise like that
makes a trip between planets awful long. Maybe it'd be
best if—

SIMON

I have... money... Coin.

(digs in his vest)

I believe gentlemen such as yourself prefer to avoid Alliance credits, if possible.

Simon shows the captain a stack of cash in his wallet.

The young punk notices and stops chewing.

FREIGHTER CAPTAIN
You're just full of surprises, aren't-cha?

Simon smiles. River tugs on him again.

RIVER
Simon! We have to go! Now!

FREIGHTER CAPTAIN
We're not leavin' yet, little lady.

SIMON
Am I to assume, then, that we have a deal?

FREIGHTER CAPTAIN
We have a deal, son. Want me to take your bags for you?

River tugs on Simon again, leading him away.

SIMON
Yes, thank you! I guess we'll be back!

FREIGHTER CAPTAIN
Don't worry none! I ain't goin' anywhere! Get somethin' ta eat! It's protein from here on out.

Simon allows River to pull him along now, away from the docks. They pass the young punk—

SIMON
River, what's wrong with you?

RIVER
Come on, Simon. Hurry. It's coming fast.

—who throws away his empty meat-stick and follows them.

INT. BENA – COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM – LATE AFTERNOON

Inara paces the room, looking from time to time to her personal Wave monitor.

INARA
(mumbling)
"Behave just like him." Just like him! How could she say
such a thing! That settles it...

Finally, she throws herself down into the chair in front of the Wave monitor. She hits a few keys. "Waving..." appears on the monitor. Then, Simon's face.

SIMON (via Wave)
Hello.

INARA
Hello, Simon, I'm sorry to—

SIMON (via Wave)
I am unavailable to talk at the moment, but if you would like to record a message, I will get back to you as soon as I can. *Xie-xie* <Thank you>.

INARA
Gorramit.

The Wave monitor BEEPS. Simon's face disappears and "Recording" fills the screen. Inara sits up straight and shows a pleasant smile.

INARA (cont'd)
Ni hao <Hello>, Simon. I apologize for the impersonal nature of a recorded message, but I was wondering if you could deliver a message to the Captain for me?
(takes a breath)
I seem to have left some of my personal belongings in my old shuttle. There's no need to make a special trip. Just ask the Captain if he would be so kind as to have them shipped the next time you stop to pick up mail.
(beat)
I've found a place here, Simon, where I am needed. Where I am respected. Loved, even. I have found a new family. You tell him that.

Inara looks down, at her fingers in knots. She looks up again.

INARA (cont'd)
No, don't tell him anything. Give my love to Kaylee. And Zoe and Wash. Jayne... well...
(smiles)
Know that you and River are always in my prayers. I hope someday you find the answers you're looking for. I will miss you all very much.
(beat)

Tell the Captain...
(beat)
Tell Mal...

Beat.

Inara hits a button on the wave monitor. "Send Message?" comes up on the screen.
She pauses, her finger above the button.

INT. MAIDENHEAD – NIGHT

The crew is still at the table. They have finished their mugs of spiced ale except Zoe, whose mug is still full.

ZOE
They are definitely never this late.

Jayne eyes the full mug.

MAL
First time for everythin'. They'll be here. Just relax and drink your ale.

ZOE
No thank you, sir.

JAYNE
Well, can I have it then?

Zoe nods and Jayne smiles, sweeping up the mug.

WASH
Hey, wait a minute, what happened to what's mine is yours and yours is mine?

ZOE
One's enough for you, husband. No drinking and piloting, remember?

WASH
(points at Jayne)
So, he gets to drink and... shoot?

Jayne winks and takes a gulp.

EXT. THE MAIDENHEAD – SAME TIME

Kaylee still stands outside, playing with the leafy stem of her last strawberry.

Mingo and Fanty approach. Fanty notices her, elbows his brother, and the two of them walk to her.

Rex and Flight-Helmet Man watch.

MINGO

What're you doing out here all by your lonesome, little miss mechanic?

KAYLEE

Oh, hi. Just enjoyin' the open air. Cap'n's inside waitin' for ya.

Mingo and Fanty approach the front doors. They look towards Rex and Flight-Helmet Man.

Rex nods his head towards Kaylee, as if to ask "What about her?"

Mingo and Fanty shake their heads in unison, and walk through the front doors.

EXT. BEAUMONDE STREETS – FOOD ALLEY – NIGHT

Simon holds River's arm, and hands a few coins across the counter to the OPERATOR of a kebab stand. She accepts his money and hands him two meat kebabs.

SIMON

Xie-xie <Thank you>.

He and River begin to walk away, River once again pulling him along around the corner and into

AN ALLEY

SIMON (cont'd)

River, where are you taking me?

RIVER

Home. Home is where the heart is. We have to defibrillate.

SIMON

Defibrillate? River...
(pulls back)

Do you want me to be a doctor again?

RIVER

You'll have to be if we don't get home soon!

SIMON

We can't go home. Not yet. It's just you and me now.
(hands her the kebab)
We have to take care of each other.

Simon starts to eat his kebab. River does, too, but she is distracted.

The young punk approaches, hands in his pockets.

YOUNG PUNK

They're good, ain't they?

SIMON

(on edge)
Yes, they taste... like cow. On a stick.

YOUNG PUNK

Alley rats'll fool ya that way. They get pretty plump, here
on Beaumonde.

Simon's eyes widen and he spits out the meat, leaning over, letting go of River.

In a flash, the young punk is on Simon, pointing SOMETHING into his back and grabbing his neck to hold him close. The young punk keeps Simon between himself and River.

YOUNG PUNK

Don't move! Or I shoot your boyfriend!

River just looks at the young punk.

SIMON

Just take it easy now. Easy.

YOUNG PUNK

Now, gimme your wallet, pretty boy. Nice and slow.

SIMON

All right. All right.
(starts to reach into his vest)
Just take it easy...

River starts to back away deeper into the alley.

YOUNG PUNK

Hey, girlfriend, I thought I told you not to move!

SIMON

River, stay right there...

RIVER

Playing a role. Boyfriend and girlfriend. Like Abraham and Sarah but reversed... To not get hurt...

River is near an intersecting alley.

YOUNG PUNK

Take one more step, and I kill him!

SIMON

River?!

RIVER

He's playing a role too, Simon. With props and everything.

(beat)

I have to go home.

River runs away.


Simon is shocked.

SIMON

River...

YOUNG PUNK

Your crazy girlfriend just killed you, pretty boy.



Act Three

INT. THE MAIDENHEAD – NIGHT

Rex and Flight-Helmet Man walk up to the gun check. Rex opens his simple coat wide, revealing his HANDGUN.

REX

(to his companion)

Remember, the signal is 'forty.' Twins will leave shortly after with the coin.

The large bouncer looks at the handgun, nods at the two of them, and allows them to pass.

REX (cont'd)
We don't do the job until they're gone.

FLIGHT-HELMET MAN
(nodding)
No blood on their hands.

They enter the bar, splitting up. Rex looks for

MAL'S TABLE

Where Mingo and Fanty stop.

MINGO
Domestic troubles?

FANTY
Domestic troubles?

MINGO
One of your crew is missin'. I believe we saw her outside,
lookin' a mite dejected.

FANTY
Sad, she was. A man should keep his house in order.

Mal stands up.

MAL
Mingo. Fanty.

MINGO
(pointing at his brother)
He's Mingo.

MAL
He's Fanty. You're Mingo.

MINGO
Ghahh! How is it you always know?

MAL
Fanty's prettier.
(pulling out a chair)
Feel to do some business?

MINGO
(eyeing the crew)
Bit crowded, isn't it? As you see, we come unencumbered
by thugs.

MAL
Which means at least four of the guys already in here are
yours. All's one. I'll just keep Jayne with me.

ZOE
Sir, are you sure you don't—

MAL
Go. Go get yourselves a nice romantic meal.

WASH
Those are my two favorite words!
(to Zoe)
Honey... "Meal..."

MAL
(to Zoe)
It's business. We're fine.

Wash and Zoe leave and the four remaining men sit. Fanty tosses a few coins to a
SALOON GIRL, who does a little fan-dance.

ANGLE ON – THE CORVUE CAMERA'S POV of the men is conveniently blocked by
her little dance.

AT ANOTHER TABLE – Bandana-Man and Long-Haired Man see that Mingo and
Fanty's business has begun. They nod to each other.

EXT. BEAUMONDE STREETS – SAME TIME

River runs through the crowded city streets.

EXT. BEAUMONDE STREETS – DARK ALLEY – SAME TIME

The young punk behind Simon has him under his control.

YOUNG PUNK
She left you for dead. Unless you give me your money.

SIMON
River... She would never leave me... Never...

YOUNG PUNK

Seems she has, lover boy. Now hand it over. Right now.
Or I punch another hole in your heart.

CLOSE ON – PUNK’S HAND, shoving a SMALL METAL PIPE harder into Simon’s back.

YOUNG PUNK

Do it quick! I ain’t playin’, now!

SIMON

(grimacing)

Yes, you are.

(light dawns in his eyes)

With props. Nothing but props.

Simon bats the young punk’s gripping hand away from his neck, and spins, his hands fists.

The young punk’s eyes widen, and he backs into the alley wall. He holds up the harmless metal pipe. It drops to the pavement with a CLANG. Simon looks at the pipe and back to the punk.

SIMON

Pathetic worm, you think you know crime?!

(beat)

What about the rat kebabs, was that a lie too?!

YOUNG PUNK

(suddenly polite)

Yes, mister! They don’t use rats down here for the
tourists, only over on Jasper Lane! I swear! I’m sorry!
Don’t hurt me, mister!

Beat. Simon’s hands are still fists.

SIMON

Get out of here.

The young punk starts to run deeper into the alley where River went. Simon grabs him.

SIMON (cont’d)

Not that way!

The young punk runs back towards the street.

Simon watches him go.

SIMON (cont'd)
She wants to go home. To warn the family...

Simon's eyes brighten as he chases after his sister.

EXT. THE MAIDENHEAD – SHORT TIME LATER

Kaylee sees River running to the bar entrance. Her face beams.

KAYLEE
River! I knew you'd come an' say goodbye!

RIVER
Stay outside.

River just walks right by. Kaylee turns around, looking down the street.

KAYLEE
River? Where's Simon?

River points vaguely over her shoulder in the direction she came from without breaking stride, and enters the Maidenhead.

Kaylee takes a few steps where River pointed, scanning the crowds.

INT. THE MAIDENHEAD – SAME TIME

CLOSE ON – DUFFEL BAG

Mal's foot nudges the duffel bag of money to Mingo's foot.

MINGO
Quite a crew you've got.

MAL
Yeah, they're a fine bunch of rubeens.

MINGO
How you keep them on that crap boat is the subject of much musing 'tween me and Fanty.

FANTY
We go on and on.

MAL

So I'm noticing. Is there a problem I don't know of? You got twenty-five percent of a sweet take kissing your foot. How come we're not dispersing?

FANTY

Our end is forty, precious.

ACROSS THE BAR ON SECOND LEVEL

Rex taps his ear, having heard the signal. He looks across to Flight-Helmet Man and nods. Below at the table, they also nod.

BACK TO MAL'S TABLE

JAYNE

My muscular buttocks it's forty-

MINGO

It is as of now. Find anyone around going cheaper.

ANGLE ON – RIVER has entered, is looking about.

We stay on her as she wanders around the perimeter of the bar, switching back and forth to the table.

FANTY

You're unpredictable, Mal. Which is the single worst thing to be in this business. Mingo and me, we're greedy. Could set your watch by our greed; it wavers never. But you...

MINGO

You run when you oughta fight, fight when you oughta deal.

FANTY

Makes a business person twitchy.

MAL

Well here's a foul thought. I conjured you two were incompetent; sent us out not knowing there were Reavers about. Now I'm thinking you picked us out because you did.

MINGO

That was a sign of faith, boy. And it doesn't affect our forty per. Danger is, after all, your business.

JAYNE
Reavers ain't business, double <dumbass>.

FANTY
Your dog is barking, Malcolm.

JAYNE
Should oughta watch me bite.

MAL
Calm it, Jayne.
(to the brothers)
Look at it from our point of view.

MINGO
We never do that. Nobody who ever made a living on the
Rim ever did that. Forty percent from now on, or you two
become unidentifiable remains.

AT A TABLE ON THE SECOND LEVEL

Wash and Zoe smile at each other over their food. Wash looks down to the side and
sees River.

WASH
Hey, it's River.
(turns back, waves)
Hey! River! Up here!

ANGLE ON - RIVER

This is all background noise to River as she continues around the bar. As she moves
beneath the CorVue screen, a commercial flashes to life.

It's animated, with goofy, cartoon animals and anime-style Asian girls all
transforming to insane fantasy figures as they sing about:

COMMERCIAL
FRUITY OATY BARS MAKE A MAN OUT OF A MOUSE!
FRUITY OATY BARS MAKE YOU BUST OUT OF YOUR
BLOUSE! EAT 'EM ALL THE TIME! THEY WILL BLOW YOUR
MIND!

EXTREME CLOSE UP of River's face, in the light of the CorVue.

COMMERCIAL (cont'd)
BLOW YOUR LITTLE MIND...

All noise but the jingle fades out, finally that as well, just the hum in River's ears.

RIVER
(whispers)
Miranda.

She turns and looks back at the crowd.

ANGLE ON – her jacket, as it slips to the floor.

What happens next happens very fast.

She strides silently to the first table – two innocent men drinking quietly – and she slams her foot into one’s face, then whips it back into the other’s, knocking them both unconscious as—

—people are turning, just registering that this girl—

—kicks the table into a card player even as she sweeps a bottle off it behind her – the bottle hits a man behind her square in the face, a man she never even looked at—

—people are rising, fleeing or pushing forward—

ANGLE ON – WASH

WASH
<Buddha’s biceps>, is that—?!

Zoe watches the people around her start to panic.

ZOE
We need to get these people out of here.

Wash and Zoe abandon their romantic meal and rise from the table.

ANGLE ON – REX

As he watches River attacking people below. Bandana-Man and Long-Haired Man rise from their table below, near the fight.

REX
What the hell?

ANGLE ON – Mal and Jayne as they look past the fan dancer.

JAYNE
(excited)
Hey! A tussle!

MAL
(quietly)
Jayne...

JAYNE
River.

FANTY
You know that girl?

Mingo clutches the money bag to his chest.

MAL
(still watching, amazed)
I really don't.

Mingo and Fanty rise and run for it, amongst a crowd of people.

They pass Rex.

FANTY
(to Rex)
Do it.

MINGO
Now.

REX
(into sleeve)
Move in.

Rex and Flight-Helmet Man start to move towards Wash and Zoe's table, but it's empty.

Rex motions below. Flight-Helmet Man unsheathes a large knife. They move towards the stairs.

ANGLE ON - RIVER

She's taking out a group of four, high kicks and perfect precision.

The bouncer reaches her. She easily wrests his shockrod from him and uses it on him.

The fan-dancer bolts and River hurls the rod at her head, knocks her cold.

EXT. THE MAIDENHEAD – SAME TIME

Kaylee stands a short distance down the street, looking back the way River came. She turns back towards the Maidenhead at the sound of SCREAMS. People stream out from around the corner and run down the street.

KAYLEE
Uh oh.

SIMON (OS)
Kaylee!

Kaylee turns around. Simon runs towards her against the flow of people.

SIMON (cont'd)
Have you seen River?!

KAYLEE
She went inside!

SIMON
What, is there a fire?

Kaylee looks at the frightened people.

KAYLEE
I don't think so...

INT. THE MAIDENHEAD – SAME TIME

Mal strides up the steps to the gun locker, spinning the carousel to find his locker.

Jayne approaches River. She's everywhere. On tables, chairs, under legs, using the room itself to take out every single person inside.

The Bandana-Man sees Jayne approaching and makes his move. River swiftly kicks him towards Jayne. Bandana-Man slams into Jayne, sees it's him and reaches into his vest, rearing back with his other hand to punch.

Jayne clubs him over the head and knocks him out cold.

Long-Haired Man hides behind a wall, weighted nunchucks in his hand. Impossibly, River swings her leg around the corner and strikes the back of his head.

He staggers, still conscious.

Jayne grabs her from behind—

JAYNE
Gorrammit, girl, it's me!

She grabs his crotch and SQUEEZES. His grip loosens and she spins, facing him—
—and flat heels his nose with her palm, twirling into a gut kick that doubles him over, dispatching another patron while she cracks Jayne's head with a small table.

Rex and Flight-Helmet Man are now down on the first level. They start to cross, seeing Mal up on the second level at the guncheck. River is in their way.

Long-Haired Man has recovered and strikes at her with his nunchucks. River catches the other end and knees him in the stomach.

Flight-Helmet Man lunges forward with the knife as she pulls the nunchucks free and does a perfect split. She snares his wrist in the nunchuck chain above her head, using his momentum to stab Long-Haired Man in the groin.

She slips free and wraps the nunchucks around Flight-Helmet Man's neck and twists. The two fall to the floor in a tangled heap.

Rex points his gun at River.

River swipes at his hand, grabbing his wrist, twisting and pointing the gun at Bandana Man as he rises from the floor where Jayne clubbed him.

She pulls the trigger. Bandana-Man drops.

Above, Mal finds his locker, searches his pockets for the chit. Finds it and opens the locker.

Rex fights with River, trying to regain control. River, in a series of joint locks and maneuvers, manages to kick him in the face and wrest the gun from his grip.

Rex falls back, out cold.

Mal frantically retrieves his gun from the vending locker as—

—River whips around with Rex's gun, aiming up at Mal just as—

—Mal aims down at her.

Beat. Standoff.

Act Four

INT. THE MAIDENHEAD - NIGHT

Standoff – Mal and River continue to hold guns on each other.

Simon suddenly appears, rushing up to the railing overlooking the carnage below.

SIMON

Eta kooram nah smech!

And River drops to the ground, fast asleep.

Beat.

Mal looks around the bar. He and Simon are the only ones standing.

He looks down at River. She lies unconscious, helpless. A contemplative beat.

MAL

I think maybe we ought to leave.

EXT. SPACE

Chien's ship glides silently into frame.

INT. CHIEN'S SHIP – BRIDGE – CONTINUOUS

CAPTAIN CHIEN watches a few different screens, all depicting River staring right back at him from the angle of the CorVue screen, with "Maidenhead, Atoll Plaza, 19:27 – Property of Beaumonde Lawforce" running below.

CHIEN

Hello, River Tam.

(River turns and starts kicking)

It is so nice to finally meet you...

LIEUTENANT WALLACE is revealed looking at a separate monitor. He hits a few buttons and the CorVue screens switch forward in time to footage of Mal carrying River out of the Maidenhead

WALLACE

Looks like I owe you a drink, sir.

Chien raises an eyebrow.

WALLACE (cont'd)
A positive match with your files. Man carrying her out is
Malcolm Reynolds.

CHIEN
So we have them.

WALLACE
No, sir. Serenity's long out of port and vanished like
smoke.

CHIEN
To be expected. We need to inform him of this
development. Immediately.

INT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE – INARA’S ROOM – EVENING

Inara sits before the Wave monitor, her head in one hand, weary. She twirls her
hair with one finger, looking at the curl. The Wave monitor still reads "Send
Message?"

There is a KNOCK at the door. Inara stands.

INARA
Come in.

Sheydra enters.

INARA (cont'd)
Good evening. How are you?

SHEYDRA
Concerned about you, shut up in your room all afternoon.
And without a client. Is everything okay?

Sheydra's glances at the Wave monitor. Inara hits a button and the screen goes
dark.

INARA
Just catching up on correspondence.

SHEYDRA
Jude has been asking after you all afternoon.

INARA
That's nice.

SHEYDRA
Are you avoiding him?

INARA
No, of course not. I quite like him. He has a... gentle
manner about him.

Sheydra gives Inara a "So?" look.

INARA (cont'd)
I'm not taking clients now. I'm teaching. You know that.

SHEYDRA
Inara, you are a strong woman. Stronger than me. You
are ready to move on.

Inara doesn't answer.

SHEYDRA (cont'd)
I'll let you be. Will Jude see you for evening tea?

Sheydra takes a step toward the door when it seems that Inara will not answer.
Then...

INARA
Yes.

SHEYDRA
Good.

Sheydra leaves the room. Inara turns the Wave monitor back on. She hits a few
buttons. "Continue Recording" appears on the screen.

INARA
Tell Mal I said goodbye.

She hits the another button.

The Wave monitor switches to "Message Sent."

INT. FREIGHTER SHIP SON OF OSIRIS – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

CLOSE ON – SIMON'S LUGGAGE

A small screen can be seen, through a gap in the luggage. We hear a faint BEEP,
and the screen displays:

ALLIED PLANETS CORTEX NETWORK: MESSAGE RECEIVED

We pull back to see the freighter captain at the cargo bay door, looking out with his arms crossed. He looks at his watch.

FREIGHTER CAPTAIN

Yin <Stupid> kids. Left their luggage behind.

(into com)

They're a no show! We best get goin'!

The cargo bay door closes.

INT. SERENITY – STORAGE LOCKER – SAME TIME

River is still asleep, lying on her side, breathing evenly.

Mal finishes HANDCUFFING her wrists to the grated floor. Stares at her a moment, then:

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He exits to find the crew waiting for him.

SIMON

May I see her?

MAL

She's still napping just now. And I believe you've got some storytelling to do. What in the hell happened back there?

WASH

Start with the part where Jayne gets knocked out by a ninety pound girl. 'Cause I don't think that's ever getting old.

ZOE

Do we know if anyone was killed?

MAL

It's likely. I know she meant to kill me, 'fore the Doc put her to sleep, which how exactly does that work, anyhow?

SIMON

Safeword.

(beat)

The people who broke River out... They had intel that River and the other subjects were being embedded with behavioral conditioning. They taught me a safeword, in case... something happened.

KAYLEE

Not sure I get it.

SIMON

A phrase that's encoded in her brain, that makes her fall asleep. If I speak the words, "Eta—"

JAYNE

(jumping back)

Well, don't say it!

ZOE

("idiot")

It only works on her, Jayne.

JAYNE

Oh. Well, now I know that.

MAL

"In case something happened."

SIMON

What?

MAL

You feel to elaborate on what that something might be? I mean they taught you that fancy safeword, they must've figured she was gonna, what? Start uncontrollably crocheting?

SIMON

They never said what—

MAL

And you never did ask.

Mal grabs him and throws him on the table, in his face. Simon struggles against him, pushing back, rising up again on his feet.

SIMON

Get your hands off—

Kaylee reacts.

MAL

Over a year!

Simon shrugs off Mal's grip, face to face. Zoe's hand retreats from the handle of her gun.

MAL (cont'd)

Over a year, you had her on my boat knowing full well she might go <monkey feces> at the wrong word and you never said a thing—

SIMON

I brought her out here so they couldn't get to her, I don't even know how they—

MAL

My ship. My crew! You had a gorram timebomb living with us!

INT. SERENITY – STORAGE LOCKER – SAME TIME

River's eyes open.

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – SAME TIME

MAL (cont'd)

What if she went off in the middle of dinner? Or in bunk with Kaylee? Did that give you a moment's pause?

Simon looks at Kaylee, the truth of Mal's words hitting him.

SIMON

I thought she was getting better.

Jayne smacks the table.

JAYNE

And I thought they was getting' off!
(off their looks)

Didn't we have a intricate plan how they was gonna be not here anymore?

KAYLEE

We couldn't leave them now...!

JAYNE

You didn't get your goolies near tore off by her! For all I know, I been rendered incompetent!

ZOE

That's impotent.

WASH

Either's good for me...

JAYNE

(not breaking stride)

But if that ain't enough, now that she's a... killer woman we ought be bringin' 'em tea and dumplings!

(to Mal)

In earnest, Mal, why'd you bring her back on?

Mal looks at Jayne, at all of them. Doesn't have an answer.

SIMON

May I see her?

Mal steps aside. Simon enters the locker.

JAYNE

She goes wooly again, we're gonna have to put a bullet to her.

SPLITSCREEN: INT. SERENITY – STORAGE LOCKER/DINING ROOM

River mouths the next words right along with Mal:

MAL

It's crossed my mind.

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – SAME TIME

WASH

Can I make a suggestion that doesn't involve violence, or is this the wrong crowd?

ZOE

Honey...

WASH

Fanty and Mingo might be coming hard down on us, or the laws... or maybe nobody could be bunged about our little social brawl. We need to get our bearings. Maybe Universe can help.

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE'S HQ – ESTABLISHING

A towering complex, with a landing pad on one side, rises up from a sea of satellite dishes and antennae. Above, the atmosphere is a sparkling ion cloud.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S HQ - LATER

MR. UNIVERSE, fidgety and excited, sits surrounded by screens, computers, feeds – machinery that looks both ultra-modern and long neglected. All the screens play different images – it's a mediaverse.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

As he watches the security feed of River's fight his image becomes a vidscreen. He's addressing Wash, Mal and Zoe.

We intercut between these two spaces:

MR. UNIVERSE

Oh, this is good. This is...

(giggles)

...she's beating up all the burly men and I'm having a catharsis, it's happening right now, you guys always bring me the very best violence. You think you're in a hot place?

WASH

That's what we're looking to learn. Is there any follow-up? a newswave...

MR. UNIVERSE

There is no "news," there's the truth of the signal, what I see, and there's the puppet theatre the Parliament's jesters foist on the somnambulant public. Monkey taught to say the word "monkey" – lead story on thirty-two planets. But the slum riots on Hera, not a—

MAL

What about this? Did this make the... puppet theatre?

MR. UNIVERSE

No, sir. I hadda go into the security feed direct.

MAL

You can do that?

MR. UNIVERSE

Can't stop the signal, Mal. Everything goes somewhere and I go everywhere. Security feeds are a traipse to access – and I wasn't the first one in, this has prints on it – oh! Look at her go! Everyone is getting bruises and contusions. Contooooosions.

ZOE

(to Mal, over that)

So somebody else has been fed this. That doesn't like me too well.

MR. UNIVERSE

Zoe, you sultry minx, stop falling in love with me. You're just gonna embarrass yourself.

As he continues, footage comes up on a monitor behind him: His wedding (in this very space). He steps on the cup, tosses confetti, waves at the camera... LENORE, Universe's beautiful blonde LOVEBOT is unmoving – in fact it's not clear whether she DOES move.

MR. UNIVERSE (cont'd)

I have a commitment to my Lovebot, it was a very beautiful ceremony, Lenore wrote her own vows, I cried like a baby. A hungry, angry baby.

(re: screen)

And she falls asleep. Which, she would be sleepy.

MAL

Can you go back? See if anybody spoke with her 'fore she acted up, made any contact with her...

Mr. Universe works the screen. The image rewinds and stops on River coming up to it, looking up at it.

She whispers the word, "Miranda," and starts to move away.

MAL

Miranda...? Go back further.

MR. UNIVERSE

No...

He pulls another screen close, starts working that one. Matching timecodes, he pulls up the commercial.

MAL

Um... please?

Mr. Universe has a third screen showing the commercial as well – and it starts breaking down, bursts of (non-Matrixy) code showing through. As he does so:

MR. UNIVERSE

Friends and potential lovers, I have good news and I have the other kind. Good is you're very smart. Someone is talking to her.

WASH

The Oaty-pus?

MAL

Subliminal. It's a subliminal message broadwaved to trigger her.

MR. UNIVERSE

(nodding)

I been seeing this code pop up all over, last few weeks. And I cannot crack it. It's Alliance and it's high military, so here then is the bad. Someone has gone to enormous trouble to find your little friend.

Mal, Zoe, and Wash look at each other.

They look to the image of River on the security feed, her wide eyes looking back at them.

CLOSE ON – Image of River.

INT. DARK ROOM – SAME TIME

We pull back from the image of River to see that it's projected on a CIRCLE OF GLASS like a mini-HUD (heads-up display). In fact, the circle of glass joins another to become the two lenses of the spectacles worn by a MAN IN GLASSES.

MR. UNIVERSE (VO, cont'd)

And found her they have.

We continue to pull back, and see that the Man in Glasses sits in the shadows behind a desk, nothing but a silhouette in the darkness.

His glasses gleam bright with images of River.

INT. SERENITY – GALLEY – SAME TIME

We see the closed and locked STORAGE LOCKER door, behind which River is being kept.

MR. UNIVERSE (cont'd)

Do you all know what it is you're carrying?

We CLOSE IN on the door slow, and hear River speaking behind it to no one but herself, quiet at first, but rising:

RIVER (OS)

You don't know. Don't know. How could you? You only know fear. But they felt nothing. They lie down. Fall asleep. Brainwaves dissipate. Muscle paralysis. Dead weight. Sleep is traumatic. Dead weight. Dead dead dead dead DEAD! All of them!

BLACKOUT